

Amendments to the Specification:

Please delete the paragraph beginning at page 2, lines 5 through 21, which starts with "Such a positioning is known from,".

Please delete the paragraph beginning at page 2, lines 22 through 26, which starts with "The plates form a potential".

Please add the following new paragraphs after the paragraph ending on page 1, line 36:

--Such a positioning is known from JP-A-61111221 in which an apparatus for aligning transported articles, e.g. fruit, is shown. The apparatus comprises paired left and right belt surfaces inclined like an inverted fan. The interval between the belt surfaces is gradually increased as it comes to the transfer terminal end, so that the delivered transported article is transferred in the same altitude as it is. The construction of the apparatus according this patent is simple and aligns the transported articles. However, the freedom of design of the shape of the transport surfaces, the hygiene in use of the belts and the lifetime of the transporting belts is limited.--

Another device for positioning is know from EP 0 456 155; this device is specifically designed for transporting and packaging sausages. Described on the basis of the figures of this patent publication are means for axially positioning the sausages. These means are formed by a pair of plates placed above a feed conveyor for the sausages. The plates are disposed vertically at an angle such that they together form a mouth opening through which the sausages are discharged. The plates serve to press the sausages not supplied axially relative to the mouth opening into the desired orientation. Such a construction with positioning plates is

structurally very simple but has the drawback that the contact between the plates and the (half-) products can result in undesired effects. Soft sausages can thus be deformed, meat remnants can remain on the plates, leading to contamination, and sausages lying too close together can be pressed together. The plates form a potential source of blockages. Another significant drawback is that the sausages according to this prior art are not always brought into the desired orientation; the sausages are found in practice to also assume orientations differing from the axial.--

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 2, line 35, and ending on page 4, line 6, with the following amended paragraph:

--The invention provides for this purpose a device for positioning separately supplied elongate meat products, comprising: two driven endless aligning conveyors running with the transport paths substantially parallel to each other, which transport paths together form a support for the meat products for transporting such that, at the position where the transport paths are mutually adjacent, they are in a lower position than when at a greater mutual distance. The downwardly converging inclined surfaces of the aligning conveyors being constructed from a plurality of substantially form-retaining segments which are fixed to endless support members provides the advantage that it provided a total freedom in the shape of the segments providing the contact surfaces with the elongated meat products. The freedom in designing the conveyor chute formed by the aligning conveyors together is very great here, without complex constructions being required to drive or bring about circulation of the individual aligning conveyors. The form of the contact surface with which the meat products come into contact (this contact surface being formed by the combined

form of the aligning conveyors) results in the meat products displacing to the lowest possible position, which has the form of a chute created by the aligning conveyors. Through displacement to the lowest possible position (for instance by means of sliding, rolling or a combination hereof), the meat products, depending on the specific processing conditions, will already largely assume a successive axial orientation. The advantage of the device according to the invention is that the meat products do not undergo any forced movement herein, but take on the desired orientation only by means of gravitational force. This limits the chance of damage to the meat products and contamination of the transporting and positioning means. An advantage of using two aligning conveyors running partially parallel is that individually they can have a simple construction, while together they still provide the desired "conveyer chute" with a shape freely to be chosen. An endless conveyor with a conveyer surface of complex form requires solutions which are structurally much more difficult. Furthermore, also the freedom in the design of the shape of the transport path defined by the aligning conveyors increases. Another advantage here is that this "conveyer chute" can be opened on the underside, so that possible contaminants such as loose meat portions can be discharged downward through the chute. In order to prevent the meat products themselves also being able to fall downward in uncontrolled manner between the individual aligning conveyors, the distance between the aligning conveyors is preferably smaller than the smallest diameter perpendicularly of the longitudinal axis 30 through the elongate meat products. --

Please add the following new paragraph after the paragraph ending on page 4, line 6:

-- Another advantage here is that this "conveyer chute" can be opened on the underside and between the form-retaining segments, so that possible contaminants such as loose meat portions can be discharged downward through the chute between the form-retaining segments. In order to prevent the meat products themselves also being able to fall downward in uncontrolled manner between the individual aligning conveyors, the distance between the aligning conveyors is preferably smaller than the smallest diameter perpendicularly of the longitudinal axis 30 through the elongate meat products. Another option is to exchange individual form-retaining segments in case of damage or for maintenance purposes. Yet another option is to change the configuration of the aligning conveyors by exchanging all, or only a part, of the form-retaining segments. This makes the device according the present invention more flexible in use than the prior art apparatus for aligning. Also, any belts or chains can thus be used as endless support members that are optimized without any restrictions due to the fact that they only have to support and to transport the individual form-retaining segments; the function of supporting the elongated meat products is dealt with by the individual form-retaining segments which can be optimized for their different support function. The present invention enables thus to provide a more solid and hygienic transporting and positioning device.--

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 6, line 12, and ending on page 7, line 10, with the following amended paragraph:

-- The invention also provides a method for positioning separately supplied elongate meat products by the successive steps of: a) collecting successively supplied elongate meat products from a supply position by means of two aligning conveyors running with the transport paths substantially parallel to each other, b) displacing the aligning conveyors with the meat products supported thereby in the direction of transport, and c) unloading the positioned elongate meat products from the aligning conveyors through an opening between the transport paths of the aligning conveyors, which opening increases in the direction of transport. The advantages as already described above with reference to the device according to the present invention can be realized by means of this method. Additionally, the further step d) of displacing the aligning conveyors at different speeds during processing step b) provides the advantage of the meat products which are not yet initially positioned axially (for instance sausages initially lying transversely of the direction of transport) will still take on the desired axial orientation owing to the difference in speed. The aligning conveyors will exert limited external forces on the meat products in order to ensure the desired orientation; the meat product can displace in an unforced manner. In a preferred application of this method the transport paths of the aligning conveyors, owing to the form thereof, guide the meat products during processing step a) to a preferred orientation in axial direction. Without exerting external forces other than gravity, the meat products will thus position themselves in unforced manner. This is also possible during processing step b) when the transport paths of the aligning conveyors, owing to the form thereof, guide the meat products to a preferred orientation in axial direction

during displacing of the meat products. When the aligning conveyors are also displaced at different speeds during processing step b), the aligning conveyors will exert limited external forces on the meat products in order to ensure the desired orientation, although also in this case the meat product can displace in unforced manner. Tests have shown that the difference in speed with which the aligning conveyors are displaced preferably amounts to less than 10% of the speed of the fastest-moving aligning conveyor.--